CRITICAL DIGEST

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Digests of Current New York Theatre Reviews

Picnic-Music Box-2/19/53 Majority of rave notices lauded William Inge's second play produced by Theatre Guild, directed by Joshua Logan. Kerr,Herald Tribune,sole dissenter, with McClain,Journal American,filing a mild pro verdict. Most of pro side felt script was better than author's hit Come back,Little Sheba. Atkinson,Times, summed up this view by commenting that Inge has made a rich and fundamental play that is tremendously moving in its last act. Beautiful writing is matched by beautiful direction and beautiful acting by cast which includes Ralph Meeker,Janice Rule, Kim Stanley and Peggy Conklin. Though most felt play more important in his serious moments, Chapman,News,credited it as a fine,absorbing comedy of sex as sex is admired and practiced in a small town somewhere in Kansas. This script,he adds, has a wider range,and is sharper and more pungent than Sheba.Coleman,Mirror,also thinks this is better than Sheba, because its characters are well defined and the situations fully developed. Winchell added to Coleman review "No.1. Smash." Hawkings,World Telegram & Sun, praised author for weaving his characters into a fabric that is rich with temperament and drama,both apparent and beneath the surface. Sole weakness he could note is that production's expertness sometimes detracts. Everything and everybody is just right,okays Watts,Post, who will be astonished if Inge's play isn't a dramatic hit of vast proportions. Kerr panned it because for far too much of evening what should have been sensitive is made strident. Combination of Logan's firm,staccato and rigidly refined style to this fragile summer sunset piece, plus lead characters acting in "Streetcar" style were major complaints.

John Brown's Body- Century 2/14/53. Dramatic reading of Stephen Vincent Benet's poem by Tyrone Power, Raymond Massey and Judith Anderson, presented by Paul Gregory won raves from all daily critics except Chapman,News, and McClain,Journal American. Latter okayed it as reading,but not as theatre; while former panned it as boring evening. Majority of critics were pleasantly surprised that Power turned out to be such an interesting actor,well able to keep up with the rest of cast. Mixed chorus directed by Richard White also shared praises. Atkinson,Times,felt evening could be billed as vivid theatre,in production which refreshes the whole conception of theatre. Music by Walter Schumann credited w ith fine blending.

Misalliance-City Center 2/18/53 . NYC Theatre company second limited run production of season won top applause from all daily drama critics. None of the critics is ready to admit the plot or idea behind the Shaw play,first produced in 1910, is either apparent or worthwhile; but all agreed there was more than enough sparkling Shavian wit to provide an evening's fun. Barry Jones, Roddy McDowell, Tamara Geva, William Redfield and the entire cast were cheered for fine performances. Script is stream of bright improvisations that contain many odds and ends from Shaw's lexicon of social principles,sums up Atkinson,Times. Critics agreed that everybody,cast and audience,had fun.

Maggie- National 2/18/53. Betty Paul, English star, won full support of NYC daily critics in musical version of Barrie's What Every Woman Knows. Though several reviewers noted an elusive charm about proceedings,none really praised it or really panned it. Mild so-so reviews best way to sum up lack of feeling. Except for kind words for Paul, few enjoyed book by Hugh Thomas,or lyrics and music by William Roy.Many blamed Michael Gordon's direction for slow pace of evening. Production sponsored by Franklin G ilbert and John Fearnley closed after 5 shows.

' Off Broadway Notes '

Coriolanus , with special adaption by Prof. Elizabeth P Stein,Hunter College, playing Thur thru Sun evenings at Provincetown Repertory's 8th Season of Revivals ...Originals Only presented scene from current production Gordon Reilly on WABD TV "Stage a Number"...Phaedra, classical tragedy by Racine , opens Feb 26 at Dramatic Workshop and will pay for 3 weekends...La Boheme playing weekends at Amato Opera Theatre...Arthur Miller discussion of his plays at Circle in Square Feb 22 was sell-out,forcing playwright to repeat discussion Feb 23. Dorothy Parker,John Latouche, John Gassner, Langston Hughes and Jan Meyerowtiz are listed for future Sunday afternoon talks...Columbia Theatre Associates present Poor Eddy, ballet biography of Edgar Allen Poe, in late March...Thomas Clancy will sponsor production of Sean O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars March 12 at Current Stages... Jerry Friedman, who directed Equity Library Production of As You Like It,signed by Columbia Pictures...The Devil in Boston, Lion Feuchtwanger's play of American 17th century witch hunts being produced in Yiddish at Barbizon Plaza won mild pro from Rice,Post,who didn't think the work reached dramatic heights of The Crucible...Angelic Doctor, Blackfriars' G uild production of Rev. Brandan Larnen's script, recommended by Coleman,Mirror, to the devout and to those who would like to learn more about St. Thomas Aquinas..

' V audeville Notes '

Danny Kaye and company extended its run at Palace to April 12..."Color Carnival" , present Radio City Music Hall revue, didn't win top ratings from trade press. Abel,Variety,noted that Russell Markert production was lush,if longish, going overboard on the concert platform approach when more zing is necessary.Show too much in same key as house's film "Tonight We Wing." Francis,B illboard,listed stage show as one of the spot's dullest...Roxy ice show version of "Sleeping Beauty" tale also won mild reviews from trade press. Rolontz,Billboard,found it imaginatively staged,and ingeniously produced with Terry Brent, Ray Frost and Romayne in good form. While Chan,Variety, okayed it for kids only, being only fair to middling on talent side for adults... Paramount bill headed by Joni James and Dave Barry drew top applause from Francis,B illboard. Orchestra leader Johnny Long, Francis comments, won't light many fires as an emcee,but his orchestra provides splendid background for show.

' LA Theatre News '

The Drunkard recently marked up its 7300th performance at Theatre Mart... Maurice Schwartz opens new Civic Theatre March 11 with Take Now Thy Son,new play by Camille Honig. Theatre is the former Century Theater...Dream Girl continues as current production at Workshop for Sixteen...Puss 'n Boots presented weekend afternoons at Las Palmas theatre...Sartu Theatre production of Our Town won okay of LA drama critics. Bongard,News, praised theatre for getting away from slick Broadway comedy, which was starting to get boring. James Carter as stage-manager won top ratings from most... Mexican stage show at Million Dollar Theatre enjoyed by LA critics, though many remarked that project needed direction.

' Green Room Department '

FIRST NIGHT TROUBLES...Alleged drunkedness of a reviewer at opening of The Emperor's Clothes and planned action of a producer against the critic,recorded by Variety. Trade paper hears that the reviewer arrived at opening more than a half hour late and in such a condition that he had to be assisted to his seat. A producer,not the sponsor of the show in question,reported matter to League of NY Theatres, but Variety predicts no action will take place. Produce who reported incident plans to bar critic from his next opening.

PAGE PREDICTIONS...Dissenters who failed to join critical bandwagon for Geraldine Page, Broadway newcomer in Mid Summer, reminded by Watts,Post, and Nathan, Journal American that the one-note quality of her voice is also found in many of the theatre's great actresses. Helen Hayes, Katharine Cornell,Lynn Fontanne and Shirley Booth, points out the former, don't vary their quality a great deal, no matter what their roles may be. It is the ability to make that style and individuality seem to fit into the part,not to change personalities in every play,which is in the secret of their successful stardom, Watts,Post,reminds. Nathan isn't going to bet if she will be a star in the future,but he does admire the quality which,when on rare occasions manifests itself in the theatre, overshadows everything else and makes music.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Tickets for most hits are available Mon to Thur for any period, Leonard Sillman,New Faces producer,told Coleman,Mirror...Original production of The Children's Hour 17 years ago was main reason for organization of the NY Drama Critic's Circle, recalls Maney, World Telegram & Sun. Pulitizer prize award to The Old Maid enraged most of critics to degree that they banded together in group and voted Hellman play their own award.

ANTA RELE ASE EXPLAINED...Press release from ANTA announcing "survey" of talent to form a permanent resident company explained by Funke,Times. Publicity piece,which has been panned by several critics as badly written and confusing,group actually meant to put over point that there is now a long range plan being considered to determine various problems and potentials of a permanent acting troupe.

THEATRE BOOKS OKAYED..."Sources of Theatrical History", published by Theatre Annual and edited by Prof. A.M. Nagler is the most complete source of theatrical background material ever attempted, praises Burr,Playbill. Book is rich in excitement,interest and information for the general reader. Burr also enjoyed Daniel Blum's "Great Stars of the American Stage", which he discovered holds a virulent fascination upon the unwary playgoer.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Though Dial M For Murder is an established hit, author Frederick Knott cannot afford to stay here due to international income taxes being what they are, the English author told Hawkins, WT&S...William Inge is a better playwright than he is a toast maker, Rice,Post,reports after watchingg Picnic author put his burned toast in the garbage can...Americans still are suffering from the Cromwell-Puritan attitude that the theatre is at best a tolerable place, Marc Connelly told Watson,Journal American. England has gotten away from this attitude,he explained.

' Theatre News Round Up '

The Emperor's Clothes and Maggie closed...City Center plans to move Misalliance to downtown theatre after limited run at City Center...American Theatre Wing"Tony" Awards to be presented March 29...NY stagehands to get 8% wage hike... Drama Desk to hear discussion on new theatre buildings Feb 23...2 songs added to Hazel Flagg.

' Theatre Film Notes '

"Main Street to Broadway" film opening due soon may seen legit theatres cancel performances night of opening, under plan prepared by Council of Living Theatre. ...Paint Your Wagon will be first feature length film made in Cinerama process... Warner's planning 3-D film version of Dial M For Murder...Charles Feldman acquired picture rights to The Seven Year Itch, current Broadway comedy hit by George Axelrod for reported price of $250,000...Ethel Merman will star in 20th Century Fox "There is No Business Like Show Business", to be produced in June via Cinema-Scope. ...Rodgers and Hammerstein considering selling film rights to Oklahoma...MGM has rights to The House of August Moon , which Maurice Evans and George Schaefer will produce in NYC next fall...Paramount has film rights to Saint Subber production of My Three Angels, which goes into rehearsal in March...Columbia Pictures may cast Mae West as lead in Pal Joey film.

' Weekly Digests of NYC Theatre '

Hazel Flagg- Hellinger 2/11/53. Split decision recorded by weekly reviewers on merits of musical stage version of "Nothing Sacred" film. New Yorker, Newsweek, Time, and Variety critics okayed Jule Styne and Anthony Farrell production as a pleasant,if not outstanding,musical. Most agreed with daily colleagues that real stars of evening were the technical chiefs,headed by Robert Alton, dance director. Scenery by Harry Horner and Costumes by Miles White also rated cheers above any of the individual performances. Appraisers agreed that Helen Gallagaher turned in ambitious,workmanlike job in lead, but that she really isn't ready for such a chore. Hobe,Variety,commented that though her best numbers are her low-down tunes, she still is no great shakes at handling comedy lines and seems emotionally remote and lacking in star personality. Time man okayed it because he thought that even along primitive satire lines, the story is more tolerable than most musical comedy romances. Gibbs,New Yorker,recommended it for the theatre goers more frivolous evenings. Jack Whiting won top merits from Newsweek reviewer for giving sometimes slow mover a penicillin shot. Pro critics ready to agree with con critics that much of original satire from Ben Hecht script has been lost. Whatever the reason for the dullness in the Hecht book, Keating,Cue,ranks it as dreadful,too tired to be bothered with. Results were exceedingly disappointing,sighed Francis,Billboard. Lush and handsome,it emerges as spotty song and dance entertainment. Shipley,WEVD New Leader,quipped that all concerned should pull down the flagg.

On Borrowed Time-48th St Theatre 2/10/53 Except for Paul Morrison's tree which worried Gibbs,New Yorker, as looking dangerously insecure and which Francis, Billboard,thought didn't match Jo Mielziner's original 3 set production; every weekly critic loved current revival of Paul Osborn's comedy-fantasy. Victor Moore as Gramps won rave notices, weekly appraisers agreeing to the man with their daily colleagues. All noted that 15 year old script holds up pleasantly. Moore has touch of magic in role, where Dudley Digges brought only skill,applauds Time reviewer. Supporting cast headed by David John Stollery, Beulah Bondi and Melinda Markey, with Leo J. Carroll as Mr. Brink, were all praised for fine jobs. Show remains a beguiling blend of humor and pathos,okays Hobe,Variety.

The Crucible-Martin Beck 1/22/53. Though Bentley,New Republic,finds much awkwardness in both the Arthur Miller script and Jed Harris' direction, the critic admits the play is worth discussing. This alone sets it off from all other English and American plays of the season,he comments. Miller's view of life,the critic believes,is dictated by assumptions that liberals have to unlearn and which many liberals have rather publicly unlearned. Chief among assumptions is general innocence.